



Debate on Vote 16: Basic Education

Honourable Speaker, Honourable Minister and Members of Parliament

Today we consider an investment into our country's future. A building block towards prosperity. Similar to other long term financial investments, this one will not reap benefits immediately, but with consistent nurturing and support over time; will produce generations of South Africans that will contribute to our economy and determine whether the potential of our nation will be reached.

Though we rest much of our hopes on their shoulders, today these young persons are *learners* in the Basic Education system that rely on us to steer the sector into the right direction by making the right choices and ensuring adequate support through resource provision. These learners deserve more than political slogans, but real investment in their future – a commitment to their development, support of their teachers, safety and the tools to thrive in the educational environment and beyond.

This requires real leadership and a laser-like focus on the task at hand. The Democratic Alliance welcomes the decisive and bold leadership of Minister Gwarube who has achieved measurable feats over the past year. We've seen steps taken towards targeting corruption such as halting the R9.8 billion NSNP tender that would have risked centralising control and created opportunities for abuse, buckling down on financial mismanagement in struggling provinces by encouraging accountability through demanding financial recovery plans, and rooting the actions of the Department of Basic Education in service delivery such as addressing the longstanding issue of pit latrines in South African schools.

This has been a much-needed shift of the focus of South African basic educational sector towards getting the basics right and placing learners at the centre of the South African Education system – right where they belong; which surely is no easy task.

Fiscal constraints are by no means a new phenomenon that has risen with the 7th administration, but rather a direct result of historic underfunding and abuse of state funds through prioritisation of bailouts to failing SOEs over social investment that benefits South Africans. The Minister's recognition of successful models in provinces like the Western Cape shows that with good governance and planning, better outcomes are possible – even under fiscal pressure.

It is disingenuous and politically cheap for those who have governed and failed for three decades to now cry foul while the hard work of rebuilding is underway. Let us not forget that the rot in the education system began long before this administration. We condemn the political theatre that continues to creep into this space, exposing inexperience and a worrying lack of understanding of the seriousness of the work demanded by the South African education system. The DA will not allow our classrooms to be turned into battlegrounds for political one-upmanship while learners are looking to us for leadership. Our duty is to them and towards unlocking the potential that will one day reflect a return on investment based on decisions made in this House, on days like today.



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The DA supports the key investments in strengthened foundational learning through a long overdue increase in the per-child allocation in Early Childhood Development; and curriculum support with a stern focus on getting our kids to (1) read for meaning by grade 4, and (2) ensuring the rollout of mother-tongue based bilingual education.

We welcome the emphasis on inclusive education that focuses on improving the lived experiences of learners and sustainable teacher development that have been outlined by the Minister. We call on her and the Department of Basic Education to continue advocating for the 9.6 million learners that rely on the National School Nutrition Programme – to not waiver in the ever-demanding effort to nourish more learners through this programme; nor to falter in the duty of providing dignity through safe, working learning environments and impressing on the National Treasury the importance of aligning itself to this necessity.

Speaker, this budget is not about numbers, it is about creating a society in which every South African child could reach their potential by being given an equal chance to succeed in life, and for **that** success to become a return on investment that would benefit future generations to come.

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